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Higher Education and Sustainable Development: A Geographical Analysis of Educational Inequality in Nashik District, Maharashtra. (India)

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Abstract:

Higher education plays a crucial role in promoting inclusive growth and achieving sustainable development goals. Education enhances human capabilities and employment opportunities while reducing socio-economic inequality. Educational inequality in India exists in various regions and social groups. This study examines the geographical dimensions of educational inequality in higher education in the Nashik district. The main objective of this paper is to analyse spatial disparities in the distribution and accessibility of higher education institutions and study the socio-economic elements contributing to these inequalities. The study is based on secondary data collected from various sources such as the census of India, district handbooks, government reports, the university grants commission, and education statistics. The analysis focuses on indicators including the spatial distribution of colleges and universities, enrollment patterns, gender disparities, and rural-urban differences in access to higher education. Understand how geographical conditions create impact on the regional characteristics, infrastructure development, accessibility, and socio-economic conditions. The finding indicates higher education facilities are greater in urban areas as compared to rural and tribal areas. These disparities limit equal opportunities for higher education and create restrictions to overall development. The study emphasizes reducing educational inequalities, the need for regional planning, developing educational infrastructure, and inclusive policy. Equal access to education is needed to achieve the objectives of sustainable development goals.

Keywords: Higher Education, Educational Inequality, Sustainable Development, Geographical Analysis, Regional Disparities.

Introduction:

Education plays important role for human development, social progress, and economic growth. Among the various levels of education, higher education plays a particularly significant role in developing skilled human resources, fostering innovation, and strengthening knowledge-based economies. It enhances human capabilities, expands employment opportunities, and contributes to overall socio-economic development. Education important for sustainable development because it empowers individuals with knowledge and skills necessary to participate effectively in socio-economic development. Global development agenda such as the Sustainable Development Goals emphasize the importance of inclusive and equitable education, particularly through SDG Goal 4, equal access to affordable and quality higher education for all by 203(UNDP, 2019) Higher education institutions therefore play an important role in promoting sustainable development by generating knowledge, and addressing social and economic inequalities.

Educational inequality means uneven distribution of educational opportunities, resources, and outcomes among individuals or social groups due to differences in socio-economic status, gender, region, ethnicity, and social norms. Educational Inequality restrict opportunities for upward social mobility. The capability approach proposed by Amartya Sen highlight that development should be understood as the expansion of human freedoms and capabilities, and unequal access education opportunities(Sen, 1999). Pierre Bourdieu argued that educational inequalities often reproduce existing social hierarchies because access to

educational resources and cultural capital is unevenly distributed within social groups. (Bourdieu, 1986) Therefore, educational inequality not only effects individual opportunities but also reinforces broader patterns of social and economic inequality. Geographical factors such as location, accessibility, urbanization, transportation networks, and population distribution effects on the distribution of educational infrastructure. Mostly educational infrastructure and facilities available in urban and developed area, while rural area experience limited access to education facilities. These spatial disparities create differences in educational participation and enrollment patterns across regions. Therefore geographical analysis provides an important framework for understanding how spatial factors shape educational accessibility and contribute to regional inequalities in higher education.(Harvey, 2020).according to the World Bank, uneven access of higher education limits opportunities within the individuals and restricts inclusive economic growth.(World Bank, 2018) Similarly, global education monitoring reports published by UNESCO Explained higher education system alone not sufficient to reduce inequalities. Policies necessary to the equal access for marginalized communities and underdeveloped region (UNESCO, 2020).

In India, increase the number of colleges and universities, over the past few decades and higher education sector has expanded. Several research conducted by researches on higher education of India indicates that inequality continue to exist across gender groups, varies social groups, and rural-urban regions across the India(Pradeep & Tilak, 2021). In Maharashtra, disparities in higher education access varies by different district. Highly economic developed district having high concentration of universities and colleges and promote the economic development like Mumbai and Pune. Economic underdeveloped district experience comparatively limited access to higher education, mostly in tribal and rural areas. Nashik district part of Maharashtra a region with diverse socio-economic and geographical factors including urban-rural settlements, and tribal areas. Some part of district surrounded by hilly region, some part plain, and deccan plateau region create diversity within the district.

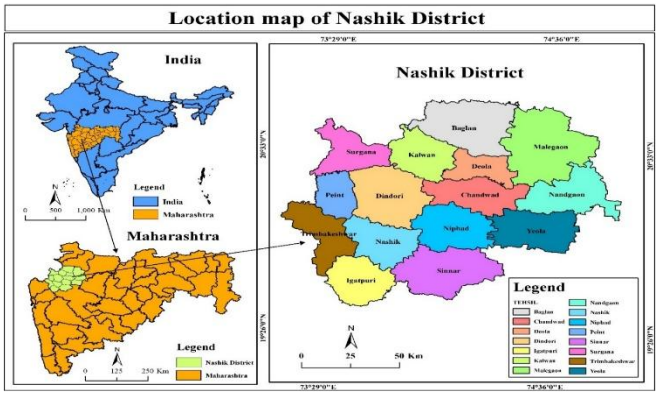
Need of the Study:

Higher education important for the overall human development, socio-economic development, and for achieving the sustainable development goals. Access to higher education remain uneven across the varies regions, social groups and individuals because of the uneven distribution of educational access, socio-economic conditions, and gender gap. Reducing educational inequality in important for achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. In India, although the higher education sector has expanded significantly, disparities in access still persist between rural and urban areas and among different socio-economic groups (Tilak, 2015). Even within relatively developed states like Maharashtra, the distribution of higher education institutions is uneven, with greater concentration in major cities such as Mumbai and Pune. In this context, examining the spatial distribution and accessibility of higher education institutions in Nashik district is important to understand regional disparities and identify factors contributing to educational inequality. Such an analysis can support effective educational planning and help promote equitable access to higher education and sustainable regional development.

Study Area:

Nashik district is located in the northwest part of the Indian state of Maharashtra. Nashik District is situated partly in the Tapi basin and partly in the upper Godavari basin. It lies between 19^0 32’ and 20^0 52’ north latitudes and 73^0 16’ and 74^0 56' east longitudes. The district is bounded by the Indian states of Gujarat to the northwest, Madhya Pradesh to the northeast, and the districts of Dhule to the north, Jalgaon to the east, Aurangabad to the southeast, Ahmednagar to the south, and Thane and Palghar to the southwest. As per Census, 2011 the district has an area of 15,530sq km and its population is 61, 07,187. While the area of the district accounts for 5.05 percent of the total area of the State, the District population constitutes 5.43 percent of the total State’s population. The density of population is 393 persons per sq. km. Among the 35 Districts of the State, the District ranks 3rd in terms of area, 4th in terms of population and 7th in terms of density. The city of Nashik, also known as Nasik, serves as the administrative headquarters of the district. It is located on the banks of the Godavari River and is approximately 185 kilometers northeast of Mumbai, the capital city of Maharashtra. There are fifteen tehsils in Nashik district Nashik, Malegaon, Niphad,

Sinnar, Dindori, Igatpuri, Chandwad, Yeola, Trambak, Peint, Surgana Kalwan, Deola, Baglan, Nandgaon(Registrar General And Census Commissioner India, 2014)



Objectives of the Study:

1. To analyse the spatial distribution and accessibility of higher education institutions in Nashik district, Maharashtra.
2. To examine regional and gender disparities in higher education and identify the geographical factors influencing educational inequality in the district.

Research Methodology:

The present study follows descriptive and analytical research to examine the geographical dimensions of educational inequality in higher education. The research primarily depends on secondary data sources, which are widely used in geographical and socio-economic studies. Secondary data related to the distribution of higher education institutions, enrollment patterns, gender participation, and rural–urban differences were collected from various official and academic sources.

The major sources of data include publications and statistical reports of the Census of India, reports and statistics published by the University Grants Commission, and educational and statistical reports of the Government of Maharashtra. These sources provide reliable and comprehensive information for understanding regional variations in higher education accessibility. Analysed data by using the basic statistical techniques such as percentages, ratios, and comparative analysis to identify disparities in the distribution and accessibility of higher education institutions.

Major Finding and Result:

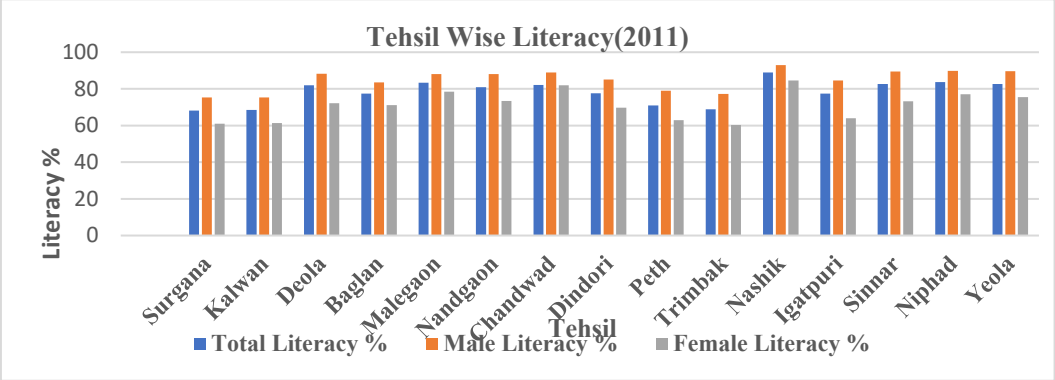
Table 1: Decadal Trends in Literacy Rate and Gender Disparity in Nashik District (1901–2011)

Sr. No.	Year	Total Literacy (%)	Nashik District Change (%)	Male Literacy (%)	Female Literacy (%)	Male–Female Disparity
1	1901	4.31	---	8.13	0.39	7.74
2	1911	4.37	0.06	8.08	0.6	7.48
3	1921	6.36	1.99	11.22	1.31	9.91
4	1931	7.89	1.53	13.79	1.77	12.02
5	1941	15.57	7.68	25.07	5.7	19.37
6	1951	11.4	−4.17	33.2	9.1	24.1
7	1961	26.89	15.49	39.36	13.71	25.65
8	1971	36.3	9.41	48.45	23.37	25.08
9	1981	44.36	8.06	56.09	31.85	24.24
10	1991	62.37	18.01	74.07	49.89	24.18
11	2001	74.15	11.78	83.37	64.16	19.21
12	2011	82.31	8.16	88.17	76.08	12.09

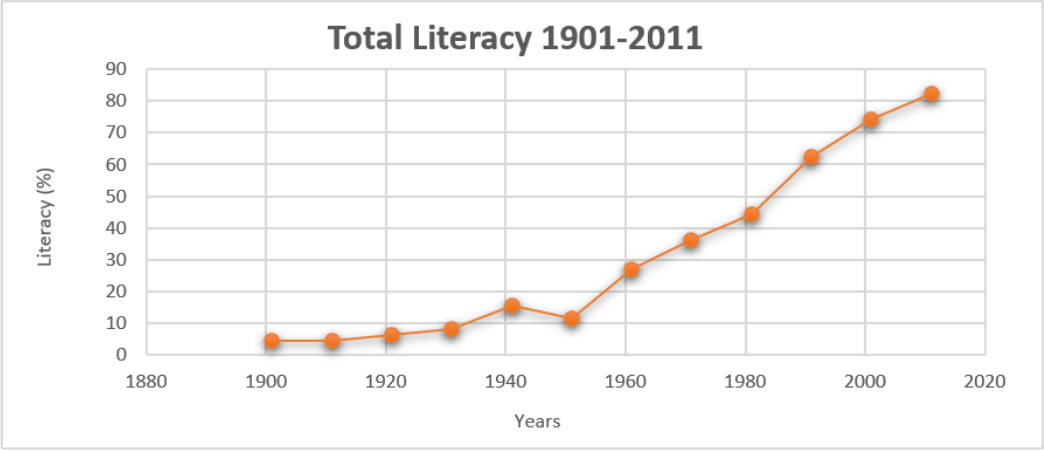
Sources: *census handbook of Nashik District 2001-2011*

The literacy rate in Nashik District shows improvement over the period from 1901 to 2011. The literacy rate increased from 4.31% in 1901 to 82.31% in 2011, indicate the educational progress in the district. Literacy increase occurred between 1931 and 1941. Literacy rate declined slightly in 1951, due to demographic and administrative changes after independence. After 1951, literacy growth increase with expansion of educational infrastructure and government initiatives. The decades between 1951-1961 and 1981-1991 recorded remarkable improvements in literacy levels. Male literacy remained higher than female literacy throughout the period. Gender literacy gap declined in later decades because f the promoted girls education. Overall, the data highlights significant improvement in literacy and a gradual reduction in gender inequality in the district.

Tehsil wise Male-Female literacy rate (2011):



The literacy pattern across the tehsils of Nashik District reveals noticeable regional variations in total, male, female, rural, and urban literacy levels. Among all tehsils, Nashik records the highest total literacy rate at 88.98%, followed by Malegaon (83.39%), Niphad (83.63%), and Yeola (82.71%), indicating relatively higher educational development in these areas. In contrast, Surgana (68.15%), Kalwan (68.5%), and Trambak (68.91%) show comparatively lower literacy levels, reflecting educational disadvantages in the tribal and geographically remote regions. Male literacy remains consistently higher than female literacy across all tehsils; however, the gap varies considerably. For example, Chandwad shows relatively balanced literacy with 88.93% male and 81.95% female literacy, while Trambak and Surgana exhibit wider gender disparities. Literacy rate in urban area highest as compare to urban area. Literacy shows the rural-urban divide in accessibility of educational facilities. Literacy in urban tehsil particularly high such as Niphad, Nashik, Sinnar, Malegaon. Overall data shows the significant spatial and gender disparities in literacy across the tehsils.



Educational Facilities in Nashik District (2023):

Tahsil	Primary Schools	High Schools	Junior Colleges	Senior Colleges	Technical Schools	Total Educational Units	% of Educational Facilities
Surgana	376	47	22	2	1	448	6.13
Kalwan	276	52	27	5	1	361	4.94
Deola	182	48	12	3	0	245	3.35
Baglan	449	100	36	5	2	592	8.10
Malegaon	651	154	64	23	5	897	12.27
Nandgaon	332	61	22	4	3	422	5.77
Chandvad	266	59	16	2	4	347	4.75
Dindori	322	80	24	5	5	436	5.96
Peint	224	29	9	2	1	265	3.62
Trimbakeshwar	304	37	14	3	4	362	4.95
Nashik	697	272	104	45	30	1148	15.70
Igatpuri	323	71	16	2	3	415	5.68
Sinnar	335	84	33	7	6	465	6.36
Niphad	356	85	37	13	4	495	6.77
Yevla	320	55	27	6	6	414	5.66
Total	5413	1234	463	127	75	7312	100.00

Source: - Socio- Economic Abstract of Nashik District 2023

Table 2. indicate the distribution of educational facilities across the tehsils of Nashik District in 2023. Spatial disparities in education infrastructure varies by tehsils. A total of 7.312 educational units in the district, including 5,413 primary schools, 1,234 high schools, 463 junior colleges, 127 senior colleges, and 75 technical schools. In the district Nashik tehsil has highest concentration of facilities, due to the urban development as compare to other tehsils. Followed by Malegaon, and Baglan tehsils indicate relatively better education infrastructure in the district. While Deola and Peint have the lowest number of educational institutions, limited access of higher education infrastructure. Higher educational institutions such as senior colleges and technical institutions mostly concentrated in urban area like Nashik and Malegaon tehsils. Finally, research indicate spatial disparities in the distribution of educational facilities among the rural-urban and economical developed tehsils having greater, while tribal tehsil, remote, and hilly area having lower higher educational facilities.

Conclusion:

The present study highlights the geographical dimensions of educational inequality in Nashik district. Higher educational inequality relevance to sustainable development in the district. Educational disparities exist in across tehsils and social groups. Gender gap in literacy has declined, however, disparities between male and female literacy and between rural and urban still exist in several tehsils. The spatial analysis of literacy and educations facilities indicates clear regional variations within the district. Economically developed and urban tehsils such as Nashik and Malegaon relatively higher literacy and highly concentration of higher educational facilities. hilly remote area and tribal tehsils such as Surgana, Kalwan, and Peint having lower literacy and limited access to educational infrastructure. These spatial disparities limit access to higher education in lower developed region.

These spatial disparities restrict equal access to higher education and limit opportunities for the study therefore emphasizes the need for balanced regional planning and policy interventions to reduce educational inequalities within the district. Strengthening higher education infrastructure in rural and tribal areas, improving transportation and accessibility, promoting gender-inclusive educational policies, and expanding technical and professional education can significantly enhance educational opportunities. Ensuring equitable access to higher education is essential not only for reducing regional and social disparities but

also for promoting inclusive growth and achieving the broader objectives of sustainable development. Thus, addressing geographical inequalities in higher education is crucial for balanced regional development and for improving the overall socio-economic progress of Nashik district.

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